



**Mile High United Way**

December 10, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary  
Office of the Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Chair, Board of Trustees  
Vernon Irvin, CenturyLink, Inc.

President and CEO  
Christine Benero

**Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105 regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018.**

Dear Madam,

Mile High United Way appreciates the opportunity to comment on the current effort undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission to study the feasibility of designating a three-digit number to the National Suicide Hotline and to assess the effectiveness of the current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

Mile High United Way's mission is to unite people, ideas, and resources to advance the common good. The United Way movement began in Denver in 1887 and sparked a movement that would grow into one of the world's most powerful forces for social change. Today, we partner with businesses, nonprofit agencies and government agencies to drive systemic changes to solve our community's toughest problems.

Mile High United Way's 2-1-1 Help Center creates a free, safe and confidential service for people to contact who may be facing complex problems. Our 2-1-1 responds to more than 78,000 requests for help each year from people residing in 17 counties in Colorado. Mile High United Way's 2-1-1 Help Center has the largest, most up-to-date database of health and human services resources in the Rocky Mountain region, and we have the ability to connect callers to more than 8,000 services that can assist them, including for food, housing, rent/utility aid, emergency shelter, clothing, transportation assistance, substance abuse treatment, child care, senior services, medical and dental care, immigration information, prescriptions, mental health providers, home repair, and many more. Since receiving the 2-1-1 designation from the Public Utilities Commission in 2002, Mile High United Way has invested \$16.5 million to ensure its success.

In addition to serving 17 Colorado counties through its 2-1-1 Help Center, Mile High United Way is the fiscal sponsor for the 2-1-1 Statewide Collaborative, which includes eight organizations that operate five 2-1-1 call centers across the state, referred to as 2-1-1 Colorado. Mile High United Way also staffs a Statewide Director position to oversee and coordinate the 2-1-1 program in Colorado. Since 2004, 2-1-1 Colorado has received more than 2.5 million calls from people seeking information and referral to community services and resources. Statewide in 2017, the call centers responded to nearly 2,500 calls related to mental health and suicide. Collectively, 2-1-1 Colorado participants contribute more than \$2.5 million annually to operate 2-1-1 centers across the state.

**LIVE UNITED**

Give. Advocate. Volunteer.

We have found that the three-digit, easy-to-remember 2-1-1 number helps people cut through the confusing and overwhelming maze of 1-800 numbers. In Colorado, there are three 3-digit services: 9-1-1, 2-1-1 and 3-1-1, which can create confusion. Another three-digit code may erode the simplicity of a single point of access for community help. We recommend that resources should be invested to improve a unified single point of access with a blended partnership of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and United Way's 2-1-1 services. This will make services more readily available because a person in crisis will likely always reach for the most familiar or most accessible number. In addition, we know that people generally have more than one need and so blending these two support systems would eliminate the need for an individual to be transferred between two organizations and streamline the support provided to the client.

Recognizing that a 3-digit number is easier to remember than a 10-digit toll-free number, Mile High United Way has had preliminary conversations with Colorado Crisis Services to utilize the 2-1-1 phone number as the Statewide Help Hotline. We are re-engaging in conversations with Colorado Crisis Services with the recent release of the Colorado Department of Human Services' request for proposals to operate a Colorado Crisis Services Statewide Crisis Line. To inform this work, we have researched 2-1-1 Arizona, a Program of Crisis Response Network in order to learn about their model, which blends crisis and 2-1-1 services.

We believe in the power of partnership to address gaps and avoid duplicating services, and Mile High United Way is a valuable partner in preventing suicide and making mental health and wellness a priority. You can learn more about our work in the Metro Denver area by visiting our website at [www.unitedwaydenver.org/2-1-1/](http://www.unitedwaydenver.org/2-1-1/) and the work of 2-1-1 Colorado by clicking on [www.211colorado.org](http://www.211colorado.org). You can also reach my office for additional questions or discussion at 303.433.8383. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Christine Benero  
President and CEO